

Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales

Final report and
recommendations

November 2012

Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales

Further information

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Foreword by Huw Evans OBE

The Deputy Minister for Skills, Jeff Cuthbert AM, launched the Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales (hereafter referred to as 'the Review') in September 2011 in Wales, setting out the vision of 'qualifications that are understood and valued and meet the needs of our young people and the Welsh economy'. The 14 months of the Review have been eventful ones in the world of qualifications. My fellow Board members and I have learned a great deal and changed some of our views significantly in the course of our deliberations.

I would like to record my heartfelt thanks to my fellow Board members and work-stream leaders for their outstanding enthusiasm, wisdom and hard work. A special mention must be made of Tamlyn Rabey (Project Manager) and Kate Crabtree (Head of Qualifications and Learning, Department for Education and Skills) for their expertise and unstinting dedication to getting the job done.

This final report represents the culmination of extensive research and evidence gathering, very significant engagement and discussion with stakeholders and advisers, analysis of the responses to our formal consultation exercise and lengthy reflection and debate. It sets out our findings and includes 42 recommendations to the Welsh Government, all of which draw on the views of stakeholders.

The focus of our thinking throughout the Review has been the best interests of learners. Young people leaving school or college now and over the coming years will be making their way in a challenging and competitive world. They will need qualifications that are respected by employers and universities, that lead to progression along their chosen pathway and that stand them in good stead if they change direction in the future. Qualifications gained in Wales must be recognised and valued across the UK and internationally, equipping youngsters from Wales to work and study worldwide.

We have an opportunity to develop a world-class qualifications system for Wales. The Review has begun the process, and this report sets out recommendations for the framework and direction. Many partners will have crucial roles in developing the detail and implementing change, with teachers and lecturers at the heart of delivery. The Board has benefitted from the willingness of stakeholder groups to share their views and to be involved. We hope that these groups will continue to work effectively together to take these important steps to secure a qualifications system that meets the needs of Wales.



Huw Evans OBE
Chair of the Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds
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Executive summary

The Review has concluded that the time has come to develop a high-quality, robust and distinctive national qualifications system for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales, and to support divergence between Wales and other parts of the UK where this is in the interests of learners in Wales. The Welsh Government should continue to work closely with policy-makers and regulators in the rest of the UK, and a large proportion of qualifications will continue to be shared with England. There may be scope for closer working and alignment with Scotland, Northern Ireland and Europe. However, decisions about qualifications in Wales must be taken in Wales in a strategic way and on the basis of what is best for our learners and our economy.

Our national qualifications system for Wales must meet the needs of all our learners, reflecting our educational ethos of inclusion and responding effectively to the needs of a bilingual nation. The system must enable teachers and lecturers to engage and motivate all learners. Qualifications must also recognise, reward and provide valid, reliable information about individuals' differing levels of achievement and ability, based on robust assessment.

In Wales we are fortunate to have a well-established and respected Baccalaureate system. Its requirements combine the subject-specific, core and wider knowledge and skills that employers, colleges and universities tell us young people need for learning, work and life. The Review proposes building on and strengthening the Welsh Baccalaureate to provide an overarching framework for qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds. The Welsh Baccalaureate should reflect and support a curriculum that provides a broad and balanced general education at 14 to 16, and coherent programmes of learning at 16 to 19. The framework should provide vocational and academic pathways for progression, leading to the award of a Welsh Baccalaureate at National and Advanced level. Attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate should become the basis for measuring the performance of providers.

Portability of qualifications gained in Wales is a critical issue. Qualifications available in Wales must be of a standard comparable with the rest of the UK and the best in the world, so that our young people can aspire to study and work wherever is best for them. The Review includes recommendations to use internationally recognised qualifications, to build our own brands over time, to maintain and improve standards and comparability and to assure the quality of qualifications. In relation to general qualifications,

the recommendations are to retain and strengthen GCSEs and A levels in Wales. For vocational qualifications, the Review makes recommendations for ensuring the relevance, value and rigour of any qualifications receiving public funding. Assessment must be robust, valid, appropriate and proportionate.

The value and currency of qualifications is largely dependent on the extent to which they are recognised and understood, so the Review recommends a substantial, long-term, UK-wide communication strategy to explain and raise the profile of qualifications in Wales.

The revised, more rigorous, Welsh Baccalaureate model should build on the widely respected strengths of the current model and on the work already invested by providers. The changes should address the concerns identified by the Review, notably the assessment method for skills elements, and unnecessary repetition of learning or assessment.

The qualifications system should support steps being taken to improve levels of literacy and numeracy, and qualifications should provide accurate assessments of these skills, upon which employers and others can rely. The Review makes recommendations for new GCSEs to assess literacy and numeracy more effectively, and proposes that these should largely replace Essential Skills Wales qualifications as the means of assessing literacy and numeracy within the Welsh Baccalaureate. The Welsh Government should work with awarding organisations and others to improve the content and assessment of Essential Skills Wales and Wider Key Skills qualifications.

The Review has concluded that a single body should be established to regulate, approve and assure the quality of all qualifications (below degree level) available in Wales, bringing in a new and stronger approach to regulation. Following this change, Welsh Ministers would continue to determine strategic policy, but regulatory decisions would be separate from government. Ministers and the new body, 'Qualifications Wales', would shape the qualifications landscape in Wales. Qualifications Wales should also become an awarding organisation for Wales. It should, in time, develop and award most qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds and most general qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Evidence and information about qualifications need to be improved and made more accessible, for the benefit of learners, parents/carers, learning providers, the regulator and policy-makers. Learners must be supported in choosing qualifications that are right for them, on the basis of impartial guidance.

The Review has been strongly evidence-based and has also benefitted from a high level of stakeholder involvement, including employers, practitioners and the university sector. The Welsh Government should take forward the implementation of any recommendations it accepts in the same spirit of evidence-based policy-making and delivery, and should collaborate and consult with delivery partners, drawing on their expertise to develop the qualifications system.

Recommendations

A national qualifications system for Wales

R1 The Welsh Government should work with its partners to develop a coherent, high-quality, robust and distinctive national qualifications system for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales, and should support divergence between Wales and other parts of the UK where this is in the interests of learners in Wales.

R2 The Welsh Government should establish a revised and more rigorous Welsh Bacculaureate model at the heart of the qualifications system for full-time learners at 14 to 19 in the school and further education sectors. The Welsh Bacculaureate should continue to incorporate stand-alone qualifications, a broadly based core, and the literacy, numeracy and wider skills required for progression in learning, work and life. At 14 to 16, the Welsh Bacculaureate should support a broad and balanced general education. At 16 to 19, it should support coherent programmes of learning.

R3 The Welsh Government should ensure that qualifications in Wales are of a standard comparable with the best in the world, so that they offer portability. To this end, it should build on current scrutiny programmes to improve processes of continuous improvement, benchmarking and independent verification of standards.

R4 The Welsh Government should launch a substantial, long-term, UK-wide communication strategy to promote and explain the qualifications available in Wales.

Qualifications Wales

R5 The Welsh Government should establish a single body (Qualifications Wales) that is responsible for the regulation and quality assurance of all non-degree level qualifications available in Wales. In time, Qualifications Wales should take responsibility for developing and awarding most qualifications for learners at 14 to 16. For learners post-16, Qualifications Wales should develop and award most general qualifications and should also regulate qualifications from other awarding organisations. The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should work together to shape the national qualifications system for Wales and to rationalise and strengthen the processes for regulation and continuous improvement, learning from the model in operation in Scotland.

Welsh-medium qualifications

R6 The Welsh Government should ensure clear pathways for progression through the medium of Welsh. GCSEs and A levels should continue to be available, as they are now, in English and Welsh, at the same cost to providers. By 2015, they should be available in English and Welsh simultaneously. Those vocational qualifications considered to be of the highest relevance and value to 14 to 19-year-old learners and the Welsh economy, should also be available in English and Welsh simultaneously and at the same cost to providers.

Evidence and information

R7 The Welsh Government should work with others to improve the evidence base in relation to qualifications, with more emphasis on outcomes, such as progression to further learning or to employment. Data sets should be better linked, using the Unique Learner Number system. Awarding organisations seeking to provide qualifications in Wales should be required to comply with the use of Unique Learner Numbers, and they and learning providers in all sectors should be required to adopt management information systems that capture Unique Learner Number data in a nationally agreed format.

R8 The Welsh Government and the careers service should work together to ensure that high-quality, impartial and reliable information and guidance about qualification options, typical progression and pathways in relation to qualifications, and appropriate labour market information, is readily available to learners through the Careers Wales website.

The Welsh Baccalaureate

R9 The Welsh Government should introduce a revised and more rigorous Welsh Baccalaureate model in September 2015. It should be available at National Foundation, National, National post-16 and Advanced levels. It should build on the widely respected strengths of the current model and on the work already invested by providers. The changes should address the concerns identified by the Review, notably the assessment method for skills elements, and repetition of learning or assessment. The model should provide flexibility for further development over time. The indicative outline model at Figure 2 (page 34) should be used as a starting point for developing the revised Welsh Baccalaureate, including arrangements for grading.

R10 The Welsh Government should introduce grading of the Welsh Baccalaureate at Advanced level for teaching from September 2013 and should consider the arguments for and against grading at other levels in developing the revised Welsh Baccalaureate.

R11 The Welsh Government should encourage the universal adoption of the Welsh Baccalaureate as the basis for programmes of learning, by schools at 14 to 16 and by schools and colleges at 16 to 19 (and work-based learning settings if appropriate). At 14 to 16 all learners should follow the same Welsh Baccalaureate programme of learning, but attainment may be at Level 1 (National Foundation) or Level 2 (National). Post-16 learners should pursue either a National post-16 Welsh Baccalaureate or an Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate. For post-16 learners following a vocational pathway, the content of their Welsh Baccalaureate should be informed by the emerging Learning Area Programme approach.

R12 The Welsh Government should retain responsibility for the high-level direction, design and promotion of the Welsh Baccalaureate. Detailed development, delivery and support of the Welsh Baccalaureate should remain the responsibility of WJEC in the short term, transferring to Qualifications Wales when this body is fully established.

R13 WJEC and subsequently Qualifications Wales should use the Unique Learner Number system to keep a central record of each learner's cumulative attainment of elements of the Welsh Baccalaureate programmes, to facilitate a continuum of progression at the learner's own pace and prevent the need for duplication of assessment.

R14 Recognising the fundamental importance of good teaching and learning for the success of qualifications, the Welsh Government should work with partners to ensure a consistently high standard of delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate. Support might include resources for teacher training and for centres, development officer(s), and using an online learning hub for practitioners to share ideas or resources.

R15 The Welsh Government should explore the scope for a programme-based approach that engages learners aged 14 to 19 who are working at Entry Level. It should consider the suitability of using features of existing programmes such as traineeships.

R16 Providers should offer disengaged young people access to personalised packages of learning. These should consist primarily of regulated qualifications and units and a core of literacy and numeracy, and should lead to recognised progression routes. For young people not in education, employment or training, recognition of prior learning could make an appropriate and valuable contribution to their achievements and progression.

R17 Providers should engage more effectively with partners such as employers to deliver qualifications within and elements of the Welsh Baccalaureate including work experience, work-related education, skills-based or enterprise elements. The Welsh Government should support such collaboration.

Literacy and numeracy

R18 Building on the revisions made to GCSE English Language in 2012, the Welsh Government should review GCSE English Language and GCSE Welsh First Language in order to introduce revised GCSEs in these subjects for teaching from September 2015. The new qualifications should provide greater assurance of literacy:

- by building explicitly on the levels of literacy that are expected to be developed by the end of Key Stage 3 in response to the new Literacy and Numeracy Framework
- in English Language, by placing significantly more emphasis on the quality and accuracy of writing and on core writing skills such as spelling, punctuation and grammar than the specifications that were taught from September 2010
- by being assessed predominantly through externally marked assessments that are consistent across Wales and between the two languages.

R19 The Welsh Government should introduce, for teaching from 2015, two new mathematics GCSEs, one covering numeracy and the other covering aspects of mathematics techniques. The Numeracy GCSE should build explicitly on the levels of numeracy that are expected to be developed by the end of Key Stage 3 in response to the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. Both GCSEs should be:

- full, single-award GCSEs covering the full GCSE grade range
- assessed through externally marked examinations that are consistent across Wales.

R20 The Welsh Government should ensure that an appropriate programme of support is designed and delivered to support teachers in the introduction of the new GCSEs in English Language and Welsh First Language, Numeracy and Mathematics Techniques.

R21 The Welsh Government should use the revised GCSEs in English Language, Welsh First Language and Numeracy as the main qualifications to assess literacy and numeracy within the revised Welsh Baccalaureate. The new GCSEs should completely replace the use of Essential Skills Wales Communication and Application of Number at 14 to 16. They should also become the literacy and numeracy requirements for the Level 2 inclusive threshold for measurement of performance.

R22 If and when the Welsh Government develops or commissions new GCSEs in other subjects, it should incorporate the relevant subject-specific literacy and numeracy skills by design into the specification for those qualifications. The skills should be contextualised as appropriate for the subject, not artificially added on.

R23 The Welsh Government and learning providers should require and support learners who have not achieved A*–C grade GCSEs in English Language or Welsh First Language and Mathematics (or from 2017, Numeracy) by the age of 16, to work towards achievement of these as part of any full-time programme of study at 16 to 19.

General qualifications

R24 The Welsh Government should retain GCSEs as the main Level 1 and Level 2 general qualifications at 14 to 19. It should:

- approve alternative Levels 1 or 2 general qualifications only where essential to meet the needs of a specific group of learners
- develop new GCSEs where necessary for delivery within the Welsh Baccalaureate framework from September 2015
- in developing new GCSEs, place a greater emphasis on the application of knowledge and understanding to real-life contexts, learning from the style of questions employed in PISA tests
- allow tiering within GCSEs only where there is a clear case for doing so due to the nature of the subject
- allow the use of controlled assessment only where there is a clear case for doing so due to the nature of the learning which is to be assessed

- continue to allow unitised GCSEs, and January as well as June assessment opportunities, with a limit of one resit per unit and the higher mark counting
- retain the terminal assessment rule, under which a minimum of 40 per cent of the assessment must be taken at the end of the course
- allow Short Course or Double Award GCSE specifications only where justified on a subject-by-subject basis
- in due course, review the arguments for change to the GCSE grading structure and methodology
- generally discourage early entry (before Year 11) for GCSEs.

R25 The Welsh Government should retain A levels as the main Level 3 general qualifications at 16 to 19. The Welsh Government should:

- maintain the same A levels as England and Northern Ireland where possible, but allow variation where necessary to meet the needs of learners in Wales
- ensure that employer groups in Wales are appropriately involved in the development and/or accreditation of A levels relevant to them
- ensure that higher education institutions in Wales are appropriately involved in the development and/or accreditation of A levels.

Details will need to be discussed with fellow regulators, but evidence from the Review indicates that the Welsh Government should work to:

- retain the AS/A2 structure
- allow only one resit opportunity, with the higher mark counting
- recognise the range of views expressed by stakeholders about the continued use of units within AS and A2 and January assessment opportunities.

Essential Skills Wales and Wider Key Skills

R26 The Welsh Government and WJEC should end the use of Essential Skills Wales qualifications at 14 to 16 within the Welsh Baccalaureate.

R27 The Welsh Government should work with awarding organisations and stakeholders to review the content and assessment of Essential Skills Wales qualifications in Communication and Application of Number and to develop a more robust, consistent and reliable assessment method, with a greater proportion of externality.

R28 The Welsh Government should work with awarding organisations and stakeholders to develop a new Essential Skills Wales qualification in digital literacy to replace the current Essential Skills Wales in ICT, with a revised assessment method.

R29 The Welsh Government should ensure that the shortcomings of awarding organisations highlighted in the recent *Essential Skills Wales Comparability Study on Communication Skills Levels 1–3 (Writing Component)* (Welsh Government, 2012) are addressed as soon as possible.

R30 The Welsh Government should work with awarding organisations and stakeholders to update Wider Key Skills qualifications by reviewing the content, structure and assessment method.

Vocational qualifications

R31 The Welsh Government should ensure that the qualifications system for Wales recognises appropriate vocational qualifications on a par with equivalent general qualifications. Under the proposed revised Welsh Baccalaureate model, vocational qualifications may constitute up to 40 per cent of the external qualifications at 14 to 16, up to 100 per cent of the external supporting qualifications for the National post-16 level and up to 100 per cent of all external qualifications at Advanced level. Learners should receive the same Welsh Baccalaureate qualification at each level, whether they pursue a general or vocational pathway or a mixture of the two, as long as they meet the requirements.

R32 The Welsh Government should adopt the European convention of categorising vocational qualifications as either Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVETs), which are introductory and do not lead to occupational competence, or Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVETs), which lead to occupational competence. Of the two categories, only IVETs should be available to learners at 14 to 16, with either category available as appropriate post-16. Every vocational qualification approved for use in Wales should be clearly described as an IVET or CVET. Moving from IVETs to CVETs should be recognised as progression even where learning remains at Level 2.

R33 The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should ensure that the assessment of vocational qualifications is rigorous, valid and proportionate, with a level of externality that is appropriate for the subject and the activity being assessed. For vocational qualifications with a stated purpose of progression to higher education, written, externally marked assessment should form a significant part of the assessment method.

Relevance, value, quality and regulation

R34 The Welsh Government should ensure that the outcomes of the Review are reflected in the specification for the planned replacement to the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales. In respect of 14 to 19-year-olds, the new database should include all qualifications and units recognised for use in Wales.

R35 The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should develop a new and significantly stronger gatekeeping process for the accreditation and approval of all qualifications for use by 14 to 16-year-olds and 16 to 19-year-olds in Wales. It should:

- require awarding organisations to provide detailed evidence in relation to purpose, relevance, value, progression routes and involvement in the development process of employer or next-stage education providers
- establish appropriately representative sector qualification advisory panels to inform the accreditation and approval of vocational and relevant general qualifications for each age group, using agreed criteria relating to relevance for progression and broader educational value. The panels should also identify any gaps in relation to qualifications that assess the skills needed in their sector
- ensure that qualifications at all levels from Entry Level upwards are considered, with due weight given to criteria of engagement and motivation of all learners
- fund Sector Skills Councils/Sector Skills Organisations (SSCs/SSOs) or other appropriate employer/sector bodies to carry out a relevance rating of vocational qualifications to inform the work of the panels, and to identify gaps in provision
- ensure that all qualifications within programmes of learning at 14 to 19 are regulated qualifications accredited by the Welsh Government or Qualifications Wales.

R36 The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should strengthen and refocus the regulation and quality assurance of qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds, to ensure that awarding organisations give due consideration to:

- the relevance and value of qualifications, in particular progression and purpose
- the resources and expertise required in order to deliver and assess qualifications effectively in all settings
- the appropriateness and accuracy of information, guidance and marketing materials relating to qualifications.

R37 The Welsh Government should continue to allow awarding organisations to deliver seminars in Wales, with the aim of sharing best practice and improving delivery of qualifications. Seminars should be subject to robust regulation, and should be made available to all providers in Wales, for instance online.

Measurement of performance

R38 The Welsh Government should make attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate at the National Foundation, National and Advanced levels the headline performance measures at Levels 1, 2 and 3 respectively from 2017. At each of the levels, the Welsh Baccalaureate requirements exceed those of the current threshold measures. This change therefore represents a raising of the bar in terms of expectations about the qualifications learners should achieve.

R39 At 14 to 16, the Welsh Government should:

- continue to collect Level 2 (inclusive) threshold and capped points score data and use these as the headline measures in the medium term
- report separately on English Language/Welsh First Language and Mathematics (and, from 2017, Numeracy) to align with its priorities and the secondary school banding indicators
- introduce a limit of two GCSEs equivalence in performance terms per qualification, even where the stated size of a qualification is more than 240 Guided Learning Hours
- allocate appropriate qualifications a 0.5 GCSE equivalence where the stated size is between 60 and 120 Guided Learning Hours

- introduce a limit of 40 per cent on the contribution of non-GCSEs to the Level 1 and Level 2 thresholds (and to the external qualifications in the Welsh BaccaLaureate at 14 to 16)
- amend the population used in reporting from 15-year-olds at the start of the academic year to the whole Year 11 cohort.

R40 At 16 to 19, the Welsh Government should:

- continue to collect Level 3 threshold and average wider points score data and use these as the headline measures in the medium term
- ensure that performance criteria support a unified national qualifications system for Wales, with data collected on a consistent basis across the school sixth form, further education (FE) and work-based learning sectors, on the basis of retention, completion, attainment and progression
- report on and encourage attainment of GCSE English Language/Welsh First Language and Numeracy at A*–C by 16 to 19-year-olds who have not achieved these by 16
- collect data on A*–B attainment at A level in the school and FE sectors and consider the scope for developing a ‘Level 3 plus’ threshold capable of measuring high attainment at Level 3 across sectors
- amend the population used in reporting from 17-year-olds at the start of the academic year to the whole Year 13 cohort.

R41 Once full and relevant completion and attainment data for 16 to 19-year-olds are available, Estyn should report separately on outcomes in sixth forms and tertiary provision in FE colleges, enabling comparisons to be made between the school and FE sectors.

Wider links and next steps

R42 The Welsh Government should ensure alignment between the Review and its policies in other areas by:

- reflecting the Review’s recommendations in its curriculum review and capturing the curriculum review outcomes in the revised Welsh BaccaLaureate model where appropriate

- continuing to work with partners in developing the Learning Area Programme approach to curriculum planning post-16 and ensuring that Learning Area Programmes are compatible with the National post-16 and Advanced Welsh Bacculaureate framework
- using Welsh Bacculaureate programmes as the basis of its emerging programme approach to planning and funding post-16 provision in sixth forms and colleges
- ensuring that funding and performance measurement arrangements act as drivers for change, supporting the recommendations of the Review
- ensuring that the careers service provides the advice and guidance that learners need when choosing between qualifications, including labour market information
- incorporating the training needs of teachers, lecturers and assessors in relation to the delivery and assessment of qualifications into initial training, continuing professional development and the new Masters degree in educational practice
- assessing the potential impact on provision for adult learners or apprenticeships of any recommendations made in this Review.

1. A national qualifications system for Wales

1.1 The central conclusion of the Review is that the time has come to develop a high-quality, robust and distinctive national qualifications system for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales, and to support divergence between Wales and other parts of the UK where this is in the interests of learners in Wales. The Welsh Government should continue to work closely with policy-makers and regulators in the rest of the UK, and a large proportion of qualifications will continue to be shared between Wales and England. Similarly, there may be scope for consolidating the alignment of our system with Scotland, Northern Ireland and Europe. However, decisions about which qualifications should be accredited and approved for use in Wales, how these should be assessed, and how performance of providers in Wales should be measured, must be taken in Wales on the basis of what is best for our learners and economy.

1.2 The national qualifications system for Wales should be developed in a strategic and evidence-based way on the basis of the needs and educational and economic context of Wales. It should not be allowed to simply emerge through a series of reactions to events or decisions in England. Policy in England is diverging from the previously established position in Wales and England, presenting an opportunity to take a considered view of what kind of system we want in Wales. The Review has begun this process and sets out recommendations for the overarching framework and overall direction. Much work remains to develop the detail.

1.3 The overall feedback to the Review from stakeholders and consultation respondents was positive in relation to independence in policy and a measure of difference between qualifications where appropriate. The key concerns raised related to portability of qualifications gained in Wales, and the Board agrees that this is a critical issue. The Review includes recommendations to maintain and improve standards and quality.

1.4 A country the size of Wales has an opportunity to develop effective collaboration between government, employers, learning providers, awarding organisations and others, and to develop consensus. We can, for instance, engage employers more in the development and delivery of parts of the qualifications system. We should also recognise the challenges posed by the size of Wales, particularly acknowledging that we represent a relatively small market, and will not always be able to influence awarding organisations which are looking towards larger markets.

We recognise the distinct educational policies that have [been] developed and instigated in Wales. Further divergence will provide additional opportunities. Whatever is developed must carry the same 'weight' as qualifications elsewhere.

Governors Wales

While note ought to be taken of England, Wales has an opportunity, in theory, to develop a qualification framework that is sound and secure, and in tune with the socio-economic needs of Wales.

Brenig Davies (individual respondent)

1.5 The Board identified the following principles which it considered should characterise and underpin the qualifications system for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales. The principles informed the development of the recommendations in this report:

- high standards that are comparable with the rest of the UK and other countries
- a revised, more rigorous, Welsh Baccalaureate at the heart of the system
- internationally recognised, portable qualifications
- building and promoting branded qualifications for Wales
- public funding that is provided only for qualifications that are judged to have relevance, value and quality
- assessment that is robust, valid, appropriate and proportionate
- simplicity and coherence to improve understanding
- qualifications that support improvements in literacy and numeracy
- engagement and motivation of all learners
- access to qualifications through English and Welsh
- evidence-based policy, practice and guidance for learners
- a collaborative approach to working with employers, universities, learning providers, awarding organisations and others.

1.6 The Review has concluded that qualifications should support a curriculum that provides a broad and balanced general education at 14 to 16, and coherent programmes of learning at 16 to 19. One of the main recommendations for the new system is that, for both phases of education, a revised Welsh Baccalaureate model should form the framework for the delivery of qualifications. The Welsh Baccalaureate is well-established and respected. Its structure combines stand-alone qualifications in specific subjects with the knowledge and skills needed for the development of well-rounded citizens, equipped to progress through this phase of learning and into adult life. Some changes need to be made to address concerns about the Welsh Baccalaureate identified by the Review. Detailed recommendations for a revised Welsh Baccalaureate are set out in Section 5 (page 29).

1.7 The value and currency of qualifications are largely dependent on the extent to which they are recognised and understood. The Review is recommending a substantial, long-term, UK-wide communication strategy to raise the profile of qualifications in Wales. There should be a particular focus on promoting and explaining the revised Welsh Baccalaureate. The audiences should include learners, parents/carers and learning providers in Wales, and the media, higher education institutions and employers across the UK. This strategy will have cost implications for the Welsh Government, but the Board considers it essential for the success of the qualifications system.

1.8 In developing the detail of the qualifications system for Wales, the Welsh Government should use the well-established Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW) to consolidate and gain benefits from the alignments already achieved with other parts of the UK and with Europe.

Recommendations

R1 The Welsh Government should work with its partners to develop a coherent, high-quality, robust and distinctive national qualifications system for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales, and should support divergence between Wales and other parts of the UK where this is in the interests of learners in Wales.

R2 The Welsh Government should establish a revised and more rigorous Welsh Baccalaureate model at the heart of the qualifications system for full-time learners at 14 to 19 in the school and further education sectors. The Welsh Baccalaureate should continue to incorporate stand-alone qualifications, a broadly based core, and the literacy, numeracy and wider skills required for progression in learning, work and life. At 14 to 16, the Welsh Baccalaureate should support a broad and balanced general education. At 16 to 19, it should support coherent programmes of learning.

R3 The Welsh Government should ensure that qualifications in Wales are of a standard comparable with the best in the world, so that they offer portability. To this end, it should build on current scrutiny programmes to improve processes of continuous improvement, benchmarking and independent verification of standards.

R4 The Welsh Government should launch a substantial, long-term, UK-wide communication strategy to promote and explain the qualifications available in Wales.

2. Qualifications Wales

2.1 The Review has concluded that the Welsh Government should establish a single body, Qualifications Wales, to regulate, approve and assure the quality of all qualifications available in Wales and, in time, to develop and award the majority of general qualifications in Wales.

2.2 Until recently, decisions about qualifications were taken jointly with England and Northern Ireland. The formal establishment in 2010 of Ofqual as the qualifications regulator for England separated regulation in England from ministerial control. It followed inevitably that working collaboratively with other governments would present Ofqual with challenges. Ofqual has moved away from making three-country decisions, and many of the previous arrangements for collaboration have been dismantled. The regulation by two or more regulators of shared qualifications has become increasingly challenging, as starkly exemplified by recent events in relation to GCSE English Language.

2.3 In Wales, Welsh Ministers currently have responsibility for both policy and regulation. The Review has concluded that the current arrangements are no longer sustainable and that action is needed to strengthen the regulation of qualifications in Wales. This should be achieved by reforming the current legislative arrangements for regulation and by setting up an arms-length regulatory body referred to as Qualifications Wales. In this way, the Welsh Government would continue to determine, at a strategic level, qualifications policy in Wales, but decision making would be separated from government.

2.4 Qualifications Wales should develop a new approach to regulation, which should be supportive and collaborative, aiming for continuous improvement of quality. Key partners should be involved in the development of qualifications, working together towards common aims, and avoiding mechanistic processes that do not add value. This would allow Wales to pursue its own direction in terms of the types of qualifications that are delivered to learners in Wales and to ensure that all qualifications are consistently and fairly delivered and awarded across Wales.

2.5 In relation to the development and awarding of qualifications, the Review has taken into account the findings of the separate Review into the Structure of the General Qualifications Market, which reported to Welsh Government ministers in May 2012.

The Board has concluded that the establishment of Qualifications Wales would provide an opportunity to strengthen the central control of general qualifications in Wales, learning from the model in operation in Scotland. Wales is a small nation, and the UK qualifications market does not always deliver qualifications to meet the needs of our learners, education system or economy.

2.6 The Board is therefore recommending that Qualifications Wales should also become an awarding organisation for Wales. WJEC provides the majority of general qualifications taken by learners in Wales, and almost all of the Welsh-medium general qualifications. It would therefore be sensible for the Welsh Government and WJEC to join forces to shape the future of general qualifications in Wales. The Review is recommending that Qualifications Wales should develop, award and regulate most qualifications for learners at 14 to 16. For learners post-16, Qualifications Wales should develop and award most general qualifications and should also regulate qualifications from other awarding organisations. There should be appropriate separation of responsibilities within Qualifications Wales between the regulation and awarding of qualifications.

2.7 Qualifications Wales should regulate all vocational qualifications in Wales, strengthening the qualifications gatekeeping process and refocusing quality assurance. This will provide the flexibility to offer both UK-wide and Wales-specific vocational qualifications. The key challenge will be to ensure that the qualifications respond to the skills requirements of Wales, are relevant and rigorous and meet the needs of learners and employers. More detail about regulation is in Section 10 (page 56).

2.8 The establishment of the new body would have cost and organisational implications for the Welsh Government and WJEC, who will need to work together constructively in the best interests of learners in Wales to design and implement the change. Considerable further thought will need to be given to the governance, remit, structure, operation and accountability of Qualifications Wales and to arrangements for transition. There should be a role for an independent advisory board to provide a voice for external stakeholders.

Recommendation

R5 The Welsh Government should establish a single body (Qualifications Wales) that is responsible for the regulation and quality assurance of all non-degree level qualifications available in Wales. In time, Qualifications Wales should take responsibility for developing and awarding most qualifications for learners at 14 to 16. For learners post-16, Qualifications Wales should develop and award most general qualifications and should also regulate qualifications from other awarding organisations. The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should work together to shape the national qualifications system for Wales and to rationalise and strengthen the processes for regulation and continuous improvement, learning from the model in operation in Scotland.

3. Welsh-medium qualifications

3.1 As a bilingual nation, Wales needs qualifications and progression pathways to be available through both English and Welsh, something which the qualifications market does not deliver unaided. Recommendation 6 in relation to Welsh-medium qualifications sets out a statement of intent that the Welsh Government should accept, although it will need to establish priorities and a timetable for implementation. Recommendation 35, in relation to gatekeeping, will help, by reducing the total number of qualifications available to 14 to 19-year-olds. The Review supports the conclusions of previous evaluations that there is a continuing need for Welsh Government grant support to awarding organisations to enable them to deliver qualifications in both languages at the same time and at the same cost to providers. Grant support should prioritise the qualifications that have the highest relevance and value to learners.

3.2 The main issues identified by the Review in relation to Welsh-medium qualifications stemmed more from supply problems than from the qualifications themselves. There is a lack of resources (such as learning materials) and a shortage of personnel such as teachers, assessors, moderators or verifiers, especially in vocational areas. The Welsh Government will need to explore the impact on Welsh-medium provision of any Review recommendations that it accepts, for instance in relation to changes to assessment methods. It should plan sufficient lead-in time for any new qualifications to allow Welsh-medium versions to be available at the same time as the English ones.

Cogent supports bilingual provision to incorporate the various abilities of learners in Welsh language, both oral and written skills. There are issues based on the limitations of the language when used in technical subjects and also the availability of suitably qualified teachers and materials for the delivery of technical subjects.

Andrew Evans – Cogent Sector Skills Council

We believe that the key issues are the availability of support materials, the capacity of providers to deliver courses and geographic challenges that some students face in accessing these courses. We do not think that this is principally a qualifications issue.

Anna Brychan – NAHT Cymru

3.3 The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 could, in future, make some awarding organisations subject to new requirements in relation to the Welsh language. The Welsh Government will need to consider the implications of any new requirements in due course. In the longer term the Measure may have wider workforce implications in terms of the demand for Welsh speakers in the workplace. The qualifications system will have a part to play in meeting these needs.

Recommendation

R6 The Welsh Government should ensure clear pathways for progression through the medium of Welsh. GCSEs and A levels should continue to be available, as they are now, in English and Welsh, at the same cost to providers. By 2015, they should be available in English and Welsh simultaneously. Those vocational qualifications considered to be of the highest relevance and value to 14 to 19-year-old learners and the Welsh economy should also be available in English and Welsh simultaneously and at the same cost to providers.

4. Evidence and information

4.1 In the course of the Review the Board quickly discovered that evidence about the destinations, outcomes and progression of learners in relation to qualifications is inadequate. There are several pieces of work underway to address this, including plans to use Unique Learner Numbers to track individuals through the system, and work to improve the interpretation, accessibility and use of labour market information. This work should be supported and progressed as quickly as possible. Awarding organisations seeking to provide qualifications in Wales should be required to comply with the use of Unique Learner Numbers, and they and learning providers should be required to adopt management information systems that capture Unique Learner Number data in a nationally agreed format.

The improvement of the [data about] destinations, outcomes and progression of learners in relation to qualifications can (and should) be improved.

Allison Hunt – QuaySkills

4.2 Information about destinations should help individuals to make qualification and career choices. Clear, impartial information about qualifications is essential in enabling learners to choose the best course for them, and ensuring that it meets their expectations in terms of progression to further learning or employment. Better data should also inform decisions by providers about which options to offer to subsequent cohorts. At a national level, better information about the value and relevance of qualifications to future learning or career paths will inform policy, accreditation and approval for funding.

4.3 Recommendation 40, which deals with measurement of performance, includes a recommendation to develop consistency of post-16 data between sectors.

Recommendations

R7 The Welsh Government should work with others to improve the evidence base in relation to qualifications, with more emphasis on outcomes, such as progression to further learning or to employment. Data sets should be better linked, using the Unique Learner Number system. Awarding organisations seeking to provide qualifications in Wales should be required to comply with the use of Unique Learner Numbers, and they and learning providers in all sectors should be required to adopt management information systems that capture Unique Learner Number data in a nationally agreed format.

R8 The Welsh Government and the careers service should work together to ensure that high-quality, impartial and reliable information and guidance about qualification options, typical progression and pathways in relation to qualifications, and appropriate labour market information, is readily available to learners through the Careers Wales website.

5. The Welsh Baccalaureate

5.1 One of the strengths of the qualifications system in Wales is the well-established and respected Welsh Baccalaureate. The Review found strong support for the 'Welsh Bac'. Nearly 10 years after its introduction, it has a solid and growing basis of currency within and outside Wales. Most higher education institutions, employers, learning providers and learners recognise its relevance and value.

5.2 The Review Board has concluded that, with appropriate further development to extend its role and to address the concerns identified through the Review, the Welsh Baccalaureate will provide a strong, balanced and distinctive qualification framework for learners at 14 to 19 in Wales. Building on the strengths of the current model and on the work already invested by providers, a revised model can deliver a broad and balanced general education at 14 to 16 and coherent programmes of learning at 16 to 19.

The qualifications system does need to be simpler and more coherent ... The adoption of the overarching qualification through the Welsh Baccalaureate would be a logical solution giving the opportunity for learners to develop generic skills and therefore not be taught solely for tests.

Conwy County Council

It is a highly valued qualification which provides opportunities for skill and knowledge development not met by the qualifications framework. Assessment is sufficiently flexible to allow institutions to plan delivery models based on local circumstances.

St David's Catholic College

In general, colleges consider the Welsh Baccalaureate to have had a positive impact. It can motivate learners and helpfully broaden the learning experience for vocational as well as academically inclined students ... The project-based work, the use of team-working in learning and the skill facilitation involved in the Welsh Baccalaureate have all delivered benefits for learners. The various independent evaluations of the Welsh Baccalaureate have each borne out these benefits.

Colegau Cymru

The Welsh Baccalaureate is an excellent vehicle for delivering all of the skills young people need for employment and learning in many curriculum areas but not all. Many learners find it highly motivating, particularly at Foundation and Intermediate levels. For A level students it broadens the educational experience of the students and gives a wider general education base.

Neath Port Talbot Local Authority for 14–19

5.3 The strengths of the current Welsh Baccalaureate identified by the Review are:

- the incorporation of the broad range of skills and experience that employers, universities and others have told the Review they want young people to possess
- the emphasis on literacy and numeracy
- the other skills including 'employability' skills, and enriching experiences that contribute to a broad and well-rounded education. This includes work-related education, personal and social education and community participation
- the Individual Investigation, encouraging independent study and a range of research, thinking and communication skills
- the flexibility of the Wales, Europe and the World element. Where this is well delivered it proves popular, innovative and exciting
- the use of internationally recognised stand-alone qualifications in the options
- the accommodation of academic and vocational pathways within a single model.

5.4 The concerns about the current Welsh Baccalaureate identified by the Review are:

- the portfolio assessment method for Essential Skills Wales and Wider Key Skills is time-consuming and inappropriate for some settings
- there are instances of duplication of learning or assessment between options and the Core (for instance, learners taking both a GCSE and an Essential Skills Wales qualification in ICT)
- the quality of delivery of the Core varies too widely between providers
- the current requirements for the language element allow too much variation in what is delivered
- there is no recognition of different levels of achievement in the award received
- a low level of understanding, especially among parents/carers, of the structure, content or purpose of the Welsh Baccalaureate.

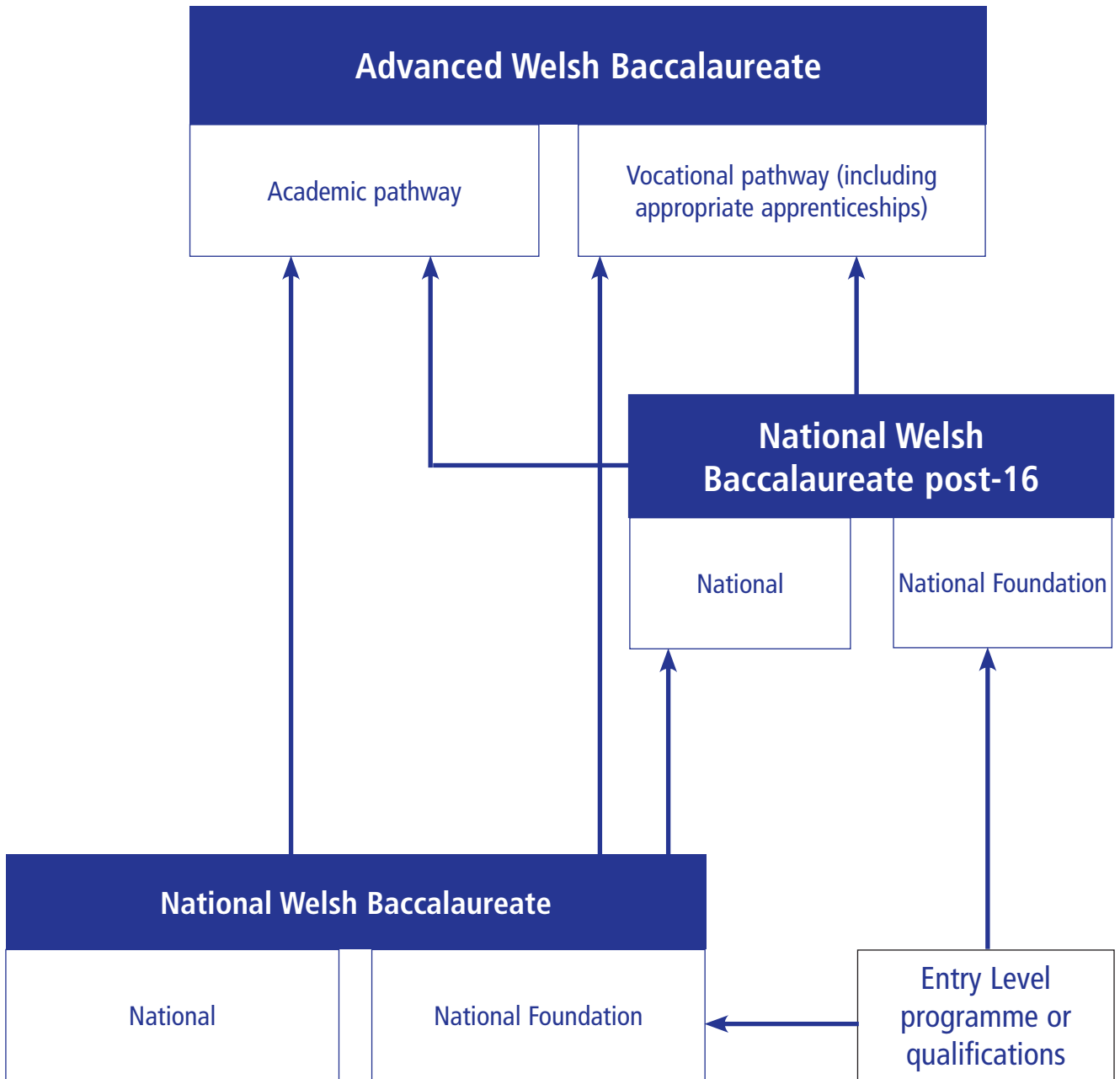
5.5 The Review team has undertaken some initial development work, to explore what the revised Welsh Baccalaureate might look like and how the concerns identified might be addressed. The proposal is that the Welsh Baccalaureate should be awarded at National Foundation, National, National post-16 and Advanced levels. Some of the most important changes that the Review is recommending are set out in detail in later sections of this report:

- introducing revised GCSEs in English Language/Welsh First Language and a new GCSE in Numeracy for assessing literacy and numeracy within the Welsh Baccalaureate (see Section 6, page 40)
- discontinuing the use of Essential Skills Wales qualifications for learners at 14 to 16 (see Section 8, page 50)
- improving Essential Skills Wales so that where it is used by learners at 16 to 19 the assessment is less time-consuming and the content is more appropriate (Section 8, page 50)
- revising the content and assessment for wider skills, with different approaches for 14 to 16-year-olds and 16 to 19-year-olds (Section 8, page 50).

5.6 The Welsh Baccalaureate should support progression through the 14 to 19 phase and into further learning, employment and adult life. A cumulative approach to aggregating 'building blocks' or required elements for each level, and a central record of each individual's attainment using the Unique Learner Number system, would enable each learner to achieve their potential at the right pace for them. Learners moving between institutions or stages would not need to repeat learning or assessment, having only to 'fill in the gaps'. Similarly, there should be arrangements for appropriate recognition of qualifications achieved in other countries.

5.7 Figure 1 shows a model for progression. The National Welsh Baccalaureate should be available to all learners at 14 to 16. All learners at this age group would follow the same programme of learning, thus ensuring that all have access to the higher level of attainment. The qualification would be awarded at National Foundation or National level according to the level of attainment achieved by the age of 16. A small number of learners would follow Entry Level qualifications or programmes (see paragraph 5.10, Page 36). Post-16 learners would either continue working towards the National level through the 'National post-16' Welsh Baccalaureate, or would move on to the Advanced level Welsh Baccalaureate.

Figure 1: The Welsh Baccalaureate – a model for progression



5.8 Figure 2 sets out what the requirements might be for attainment at the various different levels of the Welsh Baccalaureate. The architecture of the revised model must be flexible enough to accommodate future changes, for instance changes to stand-alone qualifications or elements of the Core, while providing a stable, sustainable, long-term framework and branding. It should be based on packages of learning, qualifications and credit, aggregated to meet the requirements of each level. The flexibility should enable providers to develop learning and teaching that responds to local need, for instance in partnership with local employers or universities. There will need to be considerable further development of the model and discussion with delivery partners and other stakeholders prior to introduction, which should be for teaching from September 2015.

Figure 2: Revised Welsh Baccalaureate – indicative outline of attainment outcomes

	National Foundation	National	National post-16	Advanced
Essential external qualifications	GCSE English Language or Welsh First Language grade A* –G and GCSE Numeracy grade A* –G	GCSE English Language or Welsh First Language grade A* –C and GCSE Numeracy grade A* –C	GCSE English Language or Welsh First Language grade A* –C and GCSE Numeracy grade A* –C	Two A levels grades A* –E or One A level and one equivalent Level 3 IVET/CVET or Level 3 IVET(s)/CVET(s) equivalent to two A levels
Supporting external qualifications(s)	Three further GCSEs grade A* –G or Two further GCSEs grade A* –G plus Levels 1 or 2 IVET equivalent to one GCSE or One further GCSE grade A* –G plus Levels 1 or 2 IVETs equivalent to two GCSEs	Three further GCSEs grade A* –C or Two further GCSEs grade A* –C plus Level 2 IVET equivalent to one GCSE or One further GCSE grade A* –C plus Level 2 IVETs equivalent to two GCSEs	Three further GCSEs grade A* –C or Two further GCSEs grade A* –C plus Level 2 IVET or CVET equivalent to one GCSE or One further GCSE grade A* –C plus Level 2 IVETs or CVETs equivalent to two GCSEs or Level 2 IVETs or CVETs equivalent to three GCSEs	One accredited unit in each of: Numeracy Literacy Wider Key Skills Digital literacy Attainment at Level 3 in two areas, including literacy or numeracy. Others at least Level 2
Welsh Baccalaureate Core	Project and Digital literacy and Wales, Europe and the World and any two elements from: Community participation Work-related learning Team enterprise Foreign language	Project and Digital literacy and Wales, Europe and the World and any three elements from: Community participation Work-related learning Team enterprise Foreign language	Project and Digital literacy and any four elements from: Communication Level 2* Application of Number Level 2* Wales, Europe and the World Community participation Work experience Team enterprise Language	Project and Wales Europe and the World and any three elements from: Community participation Work experience Employer study Team enterprise Language
	Elements assessed through Reflective Review (except those marked *)			Elements assessed through Reflective Review

Notes on Figure 2

- It is not proposed that specific subjects be required at National Level (other than English Language/Welsh First Language and Numeracy). The revised model therefore provides flexibility for learners and does not marginalise any subject area.
- Further work is needed to determine the level of demand for elements of the core at each level.
- The Project will be bigger than the current Individual Investigation.
- Digital literacy elements should cover the general IT skills needed by all learners.
- The current language requirement is replaced by a more substantial language option. Language qualifications including GCSEs would be allowable proxies for the foreign language and language elements. The language elements taken post-16 can include Welsh second language; the language elements taken pre-16 cannot.
- In some cases, named proxy qualifications will be allowable to prevent duplication of assessment (for instance, language GCSEs for language elements).
- New units could be developed such as writing for further study, financial literacy and using statistics. Specific recognition for participation in sports, the arts and in the community are provided in the community participation element.
- The Reflective Review will be used as overarching evidence for the assessment of the community participation, work-related learning, team enterprise, employer study and language elements (unless a separate language qualification is achieved). Learners will record their experiences and identify and reflect on the skills demonstrated.
- At National post-16 level, the Essential Skills Wales options (Communication or Application of Number) would be required for those already having the relevant GCSE (English Language/Welsh First Language or Numeracy) in order to continue developing these skills. Those working towards the GCSE(s) would not be required to undertake Essential Skills Wales as well.
- At Advanced level:
 - numeracy might be demonstrated through accredited units in, for instance, financial literacy or statistics, the new essential skills qualifications application of number, or GCSE (A*–C) in Numeracy/A level (A*–E) Mathematics
 - literacy might be demonstrated through accredited units in, for instance, writing for further study, the new essential skills qualifications in communication, or GCSE (A*–C)/A level (A*–E) English Language/Welsh First Language.

5.9 Attainment of the revised Welsh Baccalaureate would demonstrate that a learner had developed the broad range of skills and understanding needed to equip them for adult life, as well as stand-alone qualifications in specific-subject areas. The Board has therefore concluded that the Welsh Baccalaureate should be universally adopted by schools and colleges. Attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate at National Foundation, National and Advanced levels should become the headline performance measures for schools and colleges, replacing the current Level 1, Level 2 Inclusive and Level 3 thresholds respectively. The Welsh Baccalaureate performance measures in each case include, but go further than, the current measures and therefore represent a significant 'raising of the bar'. The details and recommendation in relation to this change are set out in Section 11 (page 62).

5.10 The proposed model for the Welsh Baccalaureate at Advanced level requires two A levels or equivalent as its essential external qualifications, in line with the requirements of the long-standing Level 3 threshold. However, the expectation and advice should continue to be that learners following A level courses should normally take three or more A levels, alongside the Core and other requirements of the Welsh Baccalaureate, to enhance their progression opportunities. The Welsh Baccalaureate should also provide for particularly gifted learners to ensure that they remain engaged and can achieve their full potential. The Welsh Government may wish to explore the scope for providing additional stretching activities, such as Level 4 units or a higher level of project work, within the Welsh Baccalaureate framework, for use by exceptionally able candidates.

5.11 The national qualifications system for Wales should be designed to engage and motivate all learners at 14 to 19. At Entry Level, the Welsh Government should explore the suitability of programmes such as the existing traineeships for providing appropriate programmes of learning at 14 to 19. Disengaged young people may require personalised packages of learning and qualifications, either within an alternative curriculum or within the Welsh Baccalaureate model. These packages should consist of regulated qualifications and units with a core of literacy and numeracy. They should lead to recognised progression routes.

5.12 In line with the ethos of the education system in Wales and the needs of the Welsh economy, the Welsh Baccalaureate recognises the value of both vocational and general education. This should continue, as shown in Figure 2. For post-16 learners following a vocational pathway, the content of their National post-16 or Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate should be informed by the emerging Learning Area Programme approach to curriculum planning.

5.13 Progression from the National level Welsh Baccalaureate might be to an apprenticeship, enabling a learner to combine the breadth of the Welsh Baccalaureate with the occupational specificity of the apprenticeship framework. Apprenticeships were explicitly excluded from the scope of the Review and therefore no detailed work has yet been undertaken on the interface between the Welsh Baccalaureate and apprenticeships. However, the Board notes that some apprenticeship frameworks already accommodate the Welsh Baccalaureate, and believes that the Welsh Government should seek to ensure that this remains possible, exploring the scope for extending this integration over time.

5.14 To maintain the currency of the Welsh Baccalaureate for entry to higher education, the Board recommended to the Welsh Government in January 2012 that the qualification be graded at Advanced level. The Welsh Government has already accepted this recommendation and will be introducing grading at Advanced level for teaching from 2013. Respondents to the Review's consultation were in favour of extending the grading to the other levels. In developing the revised Welsh Baccalaureate the Welsh Government should give further consideration to the arguments in relation to grading at all levels.

5.15 As with all teaching and qualifications, the quality of implementation and delivery will be the key determinant of success. Developing, promoting, supporting and where necessary improving the quality of delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate will rely on the professionalism and skills of learning providers. It is likely in the short term to require some additional support, such as learning resources for teacher training and for centres, development officer(s), or an online learning hub for practitioners to share

ideas or resources. There will be cost implications for the Welsh Government in introducing and supporting the change over the medium term. The proposed qualifications communication strategy (see paragraph 1.7, page 20) will need to promote and explain the Welsh BaccaLaureate to increase recognition and understanding, and particularly its value in the employment and higher education markets across the UK.

Recommendations

R9 The Welsh Government should introduce a revised and more rigorous Welsh BaccaLaureate model in September 2015. It should be available at National Foundation, National, National post-16 and Advanced levels. It should build on the widely respected strengths of the current model and on the work already invested by providers. The changes should address the concerns identified by the Review, notably the assessment method for skills elements, and repetition of learning or assessment. The model should provide flexibility for further development over time. The indicative outline model at Figure 2 should be used as a starting point for developing the revised Welsh BaccaLaureate, including arrangements for grading.

R10 The Welsh Government should introduce grading of the Welsh BaccaLaureate at Advanced level from September 2013 and should consider the arguments for and against grading at other levels in developing the revised Welsh BaccaLaureate.

R11 The Welsh Government should encourage the universal adoption of the Welsh BaccaLaureate as the basis for programmes of learning, by schools at 14 to 16 and by schools and colleges at 16 to 19 (and work-based learning settings if appropriate). At 14 to 16 all learners should follow the same Welsh BaccaLaureate programme of learning, but attainment may be at Level 1 (National Foundation) or Level 2 (National). Post-16 learners should pursue either a National post-16 Welsh BaccaLaureate or an Advanced Welsh BaccaLaureate. For post-16 learners following a vocational pathway, the content of their Welsh BaccaLaureate should be informed by the emerging Learning Area Programme approach.

Recommendations

R12 The Welsh Government should retain responsibility for the high level direction, design and promotion of the Welsh Baccalaureate. Detailed development, delivery and support of the Welsh Baccalaureate should remain the responsibility of WJEC in the short term, transferring to Qualifications Wales when this body is fully established.

R13 WJEC and subsequently Qualifications Wales should use the Unique Learner Number system to keep a central record of each learner's cumulative attainment of elements of the Welsh Baccalaureate programmes, to facilitate a continuum of progression at the learner's own pace and prevent the need for duplication of assessment.

R14 Recognising the fundamental importance of good teaching and learning for the success of qualifications, the Welsh Government should work with partners to ensure a consistently high standard of delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate. Support might include resources for teacher training and for centres, development officer(s), and using an online learning hub for practitioners to share ideas or resources.

R15 The Welsh Government should explore the scope for a programme-based approach that engages learners aged 14 to 19 who are working at Entry Level. It should consider the suitability of using features of existing programmes such as traineeships.

R16 Providers should offer disengaged young people access to personalised packages of learning. These should consist primarily of regulated qualifications and units and a core of literacy and numeracy, and should lead to recognised progression routes. For young people not in education, employment or training, recognition of prior learning could make an appropriate and valuable contribution to their achievements and progression.

R17 Providers should engage more effectively with partners such as employers to deliver qualifications within and elements of the Welsh Baccalaureate, including work experience, work-related education, skill-based or enterprise elements. The Welsh Government should support such collaboration.

6. Literacy and numeracy

6.1 The Review has heard clear and consistent messages from stakeholders expressing concern about literacy and numeracy. The key issues are that:

- the levels of literacy and numeracy demonstrated by many learners are not high enough
- the current GCSEs in English Language/Welsh First Language and Mathematics are widely expected to be, but are not, reliable indicators of appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy. Some employers and universities consider that grade C, or even above, does not guarantee sufficient literacy or numeracy
- there is a view that there has been insufficient focus on the quality of writing in GCSE English Language
- controlled assessment is considered by many not to be appropriate for English Language/Welsh First Language GCSEs. It is felt that a greater level of externality and control is desirable for these subjects.

At present qualifications in Wales do not give employers sufficient confidence in the skills of young people, particularly literacy, numeracy and employability skills.

Federation of Small Businesses

6.2 It is clear that literacy and numeracy must be central to the new qualifications system in Wales. Qualifications must provide clear, accurate and useful information about learners' literacy or numeracy. Qualifications, operating alongside and reflecting an appropriate curriculum and high-quality teaching, also have a role in encouraging higher standards. The Literacy and Numeracy Framework, launched by the Welsh Government in 2012, sets out the skills that young people should be able to demonstrate from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 3 (age 4 to 14). The Literacy and Numeracy Framework, combined with support for teachers in developing literacy and numeracy, represents a long-term strategy to raise young people's skills by the time they start their qualification programmes. Consultation responses showed strong support for using this framework as the basis for revised qualifications.

6.3 The current GCSE English Language does not set out solely to measure literacy. For the qualification assessed in 2012 and 2013, for example, only 13 per cent of the marks are for spelling,

punctuation and grammar, and these need not be achieved in order to get a grade C, or even an A. The current GCSE Welsh First Language places greater emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar than GCSE English Language. In both language GCSEs, a compensatory assessment model means that weaknesses in some areas can be compensated for by strengths in others, and not all grade descriptors need to be met. Steps have been taken to strengthen the proportion of marks awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar in the revised specification for teaching for English Language from 2012. It will be important to monitor whether this will have a sufficient impact on the accuracy of writing.

6.4 The Review has heard concerns about standards of literacy in both English and Welsh. However there are differences between current GCSEs in English Language and Welsh First Language. The development of robust literacy GCSEs in English and Welsh will need to be considered independently but in parallel.

6.5 The current GCSE Mathematics includes elements of numeracy but, appropriately, does other things besides.

6.6 The Board has concluded that introducing more challenging GCSEs, which more explicitly assess literacy and numeracy, could improve the relevance of core GCSEs and help increase public confidence in these key subjects.

6.7 The Literacy and Numeracy Framework currently stops at Key Stage 3, because it was assumed that the programme of teaching, learning and assessment at Key Stage 4 would be determined by GCSEs. The specifications and level of demand for future GCSEs should therefore reflect the progress that might reasonably be expected in Years 10 and 11, building on the expectations of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

6.8 The recommendations relating to GCSE English Language are being made in the context of recent high-profile concerns over the grades awarded for GCSE English Language in Wales and England, culminating in a regrading exercise in Wales in September 2012 and the introduction of a new specification for teaching from 2012. Separately, the Secretary of State for Education in England announced in September his proposals for discontinuing GCSEs in England and replacing them with new qualifications. In reaching its conclusions and developing its recommendations, the Board has taken into account the recent events and developments in Wales and England.

6.9 There should be no suggestion of learners undertaking a greater total number of English Language and/or Welsh First Language and Literature GCSEs than currently. There should continue to be an expectation that all learners taking GCSE Welsh First Language should also achieve GCSE English Language.

6.10 The recommendations propose two new mathematics GCSEs. The first of these, with a working title of GCSE Numeracy, should provide a greater assurance of numeracy by assessing the mathematical skills used in work, general study and daily life, assessing these in contexts that are relevant and meaningful and building on the level of numeracy expected at the end of Key Stage 3 in the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. The second, with a working title of GCSE Mathematics Techniques, should cover the mathematics needed for progression to scientific, technical or mathematical study.

6.11 The expectation should be that most learners would take both mathematics GCSEs. This would increase the importance of mathematics in the 14 to 16 curriculum and reflect the value placed on the subject by society, including employers and universities. However, a minority of learners would only take GCSE Numeracy.

6.12 The Welsh Government's Literacy and Numeracy Programmes rightly advocate that literacy and numeracy be taught across the curriculum, with appropriate support and continuing professional development for teachers in delivering improvements. This emphasis will need to be reflected appropriately in the assessment of a wider range of GCSEs. However, the Review has heard mixed views about whether literacy and numeracy should be assessed in qualifications in all subjects. Stakeholders have expressed concerns over the artificial nature of current arrangements for the assessment of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and the potentially disproportionate impact on the overall set of qualifications achieved by learners, particularly those with specific learning disabilities. The Review's recommendations seek to balance the benefits of the cross-curriculum approach to teaching against these concerns about assessment within qualifications. The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales will need to put in place appropriate support for teachers in the introduction of the new and revised GCSEs in English Language and Welsh First Language, Numeracy and Mathematics Techniques.

6.13 The Review Board has concluded that Level 2 literacy and numeracy can reasonably be seen as a minimum requirement for functioning effectively in everyday life and employment and for gaining other skills and knowledge. The most widely recognised qualifications demonstrating Level 2 achievement are GCSEs at A*–C grade. All learners at 14 to 19 should therefore be encouraged and given appropriate teaching and support to enable them to achieve A*–C grade GCSEs in English Language/Welsh First Language and Numeracy, continuing beyond 16 where necessary. The recommendations in relation to Welsh Bacalaureate requirements and post-16 school performance measures provide levers for encouraging this. Guidance to learners should also stress the importance of these GCSEs.

Recommendations

R18 Building on the revisions made to GCSE English Language in 2012, the Welsh Government should review GCSE English Language and GCSE Welsh First Language in order to introduce revised GCSEs in these subjects for teaching from September 2015. The new qualifications should provide greater assurance of literacy:

- by building explicitly on the levels of literacy that are expected to be developed by the end of Key Stage 3 in response to the new Literacy and Numeracy Framework
- in English Language, by placing significantly more emphasis on the quality and accuracy of writing and on core writing skills such as spelling, punctuation and grammar than the specifications that were taught from September 2010
- by being assessed predominantly through externally marked assessments that are consistent across Wales and between the two languages.

R19 The Welsh Government should introduce, for teaching from 2015, two new mathematics GCSEs, one covering numeracy and the other covering aspects of mathematics techniques. The GCSE in Numeracy should build explicitly on the levels of numeracy that are expected to be developed by the end of Key Stage 3 in response to the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. Both GCSEs should be:

- full, single-award GCSEs covering the full GCSE grade range
- assessed through externally marked examinations that are consistent across Wales.

Recommendations

R20 The Welsh Government should ensure that an appropriate programme of support is designed and delivered to support teachers in the introduction of the new GCSEs in English Language and Welsh First Language, Numeracy and Mathematics Techniques.

R21 The Welsh Government should use the revised GCSEs in English Language, Welsh First Language and Numeracy as the main qualifications to assess literacy and numeracy within the revised Welsh Baccalaureate. The new GCSEs should completely replace the use of Essential Skills Wales Communication and Application of Number at 14 to 16. They should also become the literacy and numeracy requirements for the Level 2 inclusive threshold for measurement of performance.

R22 If and when the Welsh Government develops or commissions new GCSEs in other subjects, it should incorporate the relevant subject-specific literacy and numeracy skills by design into the specification for those qualifications. The skills should be contextualised as appropriate for the subject, not artificially added on.

R23 The Welsh Government and learning providers should require and support learners who have not achieved A*–C grade GCSEs in English Language or Welsh First Language and Mathematics (or from 2017, Numeracy) by the age of 16, to work towards achievement of these as part of any full-time programme of study at 16 to 19.

7. General qualifications

7.1 The Review heard a few representations in favour of ending the use of external qualifications at the age of 16 altogether, on the grounds that almost all young people now continue in education beyond 16. While recognising the demographic trend, the Board has concluded that external qualifications at 16 still play a vital role and should be retained. They provide a benchmark after 12 years of compulsory education, they help to motivate and engage young people and they help to determine appropriate progression routes for learners.

7.2 During the course of the Review, there have been several high-profile developments in relation to GCSEs. The Secretary of State for Education in England announced his intention to replace GCSEs in England with English Baccalaureate Certificates from 2015. The Board considered carefully the implications for Wales of England's proposed divergence from the established three-country policy. It also studied the evidence base, including a significant body of feedback from stakeholders in relation to GCSEs both before and during the Review's consultation exercise. It found very strong support for and recognition of GCSEs as a brand and as a product. The Board has identified areas for improvement in GCSEs, such as the need for more emphasis on real-life contexts and more 'PISA-style' questions. But it does not recognise the analysis in commentary from England that the qualification is 'broken' or devalued. The recommendation from the Review is that the Welsh Government should retain GCSEs in Wales. The Board acknowledges that political commentary can devalue the currency of qualifications. There may come a point at which the Welsh Government will need to consider rebranding the general qualifications taken at 16 in Wales. The Board does not think it right to make recommendations in relation to this possibility at this stage, preferring to recommend a course that offers stability for learners and providers.

Changing the branding too quickly may result in more confusion than clarity. If one of the purposes of the Review is to improve the recognition of and value attached to qualifications, then there is a strong case, in the short to medium term at least, for retaining brands such as GCSE and A level since they are generally well known and are considered reputable.

Trina Neilson – Careers Wales

Retaining GCSEs and A levels in light of decisions made in Westminster could in fact strengthen the reputation of Welsh qualifications, as it will be retaining a highly respected and reputable qualification in contrast to England's divergence.

Owen Hathway – National Union of Teachers

7.3 The Review found strong support and arguments for flexibility in the design and development of GCSEs in Wales, allowing each qualification to be designed to suit the subject and the learning which is to be assessed. The Board concluded, for instance: that the Welsh Government should continue to allow some GCSEs to be unitised rather than requiring that all should be linear; that tiering of GCSEs (the use of Foundation and Higher papers) can be appropriate for a small number of subjects; that controlled assessment should be allowed where the nature of the activity being assessed demands it; and that in a few cases there may be arguments for Short Course or Double Award GCSEs. It will be for the Welsh Government and subsequently Qualifications Wales to ensure that this flexibility is used appropriately and that high standards are maintained.

7.4 The Board considered the current A*–G grading structure for GCSEs and the use of criterion-referenced methodologies. It did not find sufficient evidence to recommend a move away from the current approach or structure but concluded that further consideration of this highly technical issue should be undertaken in due course.

7.5 Several stakeholders raised concerns over the increasingly prevalent practice of entering large cohorts of learners for GCSEs in Years 9 and 10. While there is a case for early entry for particularly able candidates who are able to secure the top grades before Year 11, in general the Board felt that the practice in relation to large cohorts was likely to disadvantage most learners, who would be more likely to achieve higher grades in Year 11. For essential subjects such as mathematics or English/Welsh first language this could be particularly damaging to learners' long-term prospects, as an early pass does not always lead to progression.

7.6 The Review considered establishing a limit on the number of GCSEs taken by any individual learner, but concluded that no hard and fast rule should be imposed. However, the Board concluded that it was in the best interests of learners to achieve a smaller number of good grades at GCSE, rather than a larger number of lower grades.

It felt that in most cases between 8 and 11 GCSEs was sufficient and that there should not be pressure on young people to take excessive numbers of subjects.

7.7 In relation to A levels, the Review found strong support for the brand and product. The Board considers that A levels are fit for purpose and require little change. There was little appetite among stakeholders for divergence between the A levels used in Wales, Northern Ireland and England, with people wanting to see the three countries work cooperatively on A level development to maintain common A levels across the three nations. However, there was also an acceptance that some variation might on occasion be needed to meet the needs of learners in Wales. Ofqual has recently concluded its own consultation on the future structure of A levels in England. The Welsh Government will need to be mindful of the outcomes of that review.

7.8 The division of A levels into AS and A2 was found to be useful for entry to higher education and in providing learners with an opportunity to study a broader range of subjects at 16 to 17. The consultation also found that there is broad support for retaining opportunities to resit some elements of the course but limiting such opportunities to one resit per module, with the higher mark counting. Evidence to the Review was inconclusive in relation to the use of units within AS and A2 and January assessment opportunities.

7.9 The Board has concluded that the Welsh Government should be open to proposals for the greater involvement of universities in the development of A levels, although it remains sceptical about their capacity for taking on extensive involvement. The Welsh Government will need to ensure that universities in Wales are appropriately represented, and that employer groups are similarly involved, recognising that A levels are not solely aimed at entry to higher education but can also lead directly to employment.

Recommendations

R24 The Welsh Government should retain GCSEs as the main Level 1 and Level 2 general qualifications at 14 to 19. It should:

- approve alternative Level 1 or 2 general qualifications only where essential to meet the needs of a specific group of learners
- develop new GCSEs where necessary for delivery within the Welsh Baccalaureate framework from September 2015
- in developing new GCSEs, place a greater emphasis on the application of knowledge and understanding to real-life contexts, learning from the style of questions employed in PISA tests
- allow tiering within GCSEs only where there is a clear case for doing so due to the nature of the subject
- allow the use of controlled assessment only where there is a clear case for doing so due to the nature of the learning which is to be assessed
- continue to allow unitised GCSEs, and January as well as June assessment opportunities, with a limit of one resit per unit and the higher mark counting
- retain the terminal assessment rule, under which a minimum of 40 per cent of the assessment must be taken at the end of the course
- allow Short Course or Double Award GCSE specifications only where justified on a subject-by-subject basis
- in due course, review the arguments for change to the GCSE grading structure and methodology
- generally discourage early entry (before Year 11) for GCSEs.

Recommendations

R25 The Welsh Government should retain A levels as the main Level 3 general qualifications at 16 to 19. The Welsh Government should:

- maintain the same A levels as England and Northern Ireland where possible, but allow variation where necessary to meet the needs of learners in Wales
- ensure that employer groups in Wales are appropriately involved in the development and/or accreditation of A levels relevant to them
- ensure that higher education institutions in Wales are appropriately involved in the development and/or accreditation of A levels.

Details will need to be discussed with fellow regulators, but evidence from the Review indicates that the Welsh Government should work to:

- retain the AS/A2 structure
- allow only one resit opportunity, with the higher mark counting
- recognise the range of views expressed by stakeholders about the continued use of units within AS and A2 and January assessment opportunities.

8. Essential Skills Wales and Wider Key Skills

8.1 Essential Skills Wales qualifications cover Communication, Application of Number and ICT. Essential Skills Wales have an emphasis on transferability of skills and are designed to be applicable across a range of contexts.

8.2 Employers told the Review that the skills themselves should be an integral part of education at 14 to 19. However, Essential Skills Wales were primarily designed for adult and applied settings rather than schools, and the Review found that it can be difficult for teachers and learners in schools to generate the evidence required. The Review recommends that Essential Skills Wales qualifications should no longer be used at 14 to 16. The proposed new arrangements for assessing literacy and numeracy within the Welsh Baccalaureate, using new GCSEs, are set out in Sections 5 and 6 (pages 29 and 40). A new digital literacy element within the Core of the Welsh Baccalaureate would cover the general IT skills and awareness needed by all learners, but would not use Essential Skills Wales ICT at 14 to 16.

8.3 For post-16 learners, the Review has concluded that the content and assessment of Essential Skills Wales qualifications should be revisited. The portfolio approach to compiling evidence is widely criticised as burdensome and repetitive and is seen as often taking place at the expense of actual teaching and learning. Assessment for Essential Skills Wales is also perceived as lacking in rigour. Repeated redrafting and high levels of support mean that many learners who attain the qualifications are unable to demonstrate independently the skills expected. Subjective interpretation of the standards leads to inconsistent assessment judgements. A new assessment approach should be developed, including a greater proportion of externality, to increase consistency, reliability and robustness. The assessment method should retain enough flexibility to fit different applied activities and settings, including apprenticeships, for vocational and adult learners. The new qualifications should be trialled during 2014. At the post-16 age group, Essential Skills Wales qualifications would retain a reduced role within the revised Welsh Baccalaureate (see Section 5, page 29).

8.4 The recent Welsh Government *Essential Skills Wales Comparability Study on Communication Skills Levels 1 to 3 (Writing Component)* highlighted areas of good practice and shortcomings in awarding organisation practices relating to

assessment and verification (both internal and external). Although this study specifically related to Communication, many of the weaknesses described are linked to systems and processes and are therefore equally valid in the context of Application of Number and ICT. Awarding organisations should build on the good practice identified and should address the shortcomings identified as soon as possible, in order to strengthen the current Essential Skills Wales suite of qualifications for the benefit of learners taking the qualifications in advance of changes proposed by the Review.

8.5 The content of Essential Skills Wales ICT qualifications was found to be out of date and should be replaced by new Essential Skills Wales qualifications in digital literacy, covering the IT skills required for general learning, work and adult life. The new qualifications should be trialled during 2014.

8.6 Wider Key Skills are a set of thinking, organisational and people skills aimed at equipping individuals for further learning and for work and adult life. Wider Key Skills have an emphasis on transferability of skills and are designed to be applicable across a range of contexts. Employers have told the Review that such employability skills should be an integral part of education at 14 to 19 and that suitable qualifications should be available to assess them.

8.7 However, many stakeholders have expressed serious concerns over the current assessment of Wider Key Skills. The portfolio approach to compiling evidence is widely criticised as burdensome and repetitive and taking place at the expense of teaching and learning. In particular, the practice adopted by some awarding organisations of requiring separate collection of evidence for each Wider Key Skill is artificial and can lead to a tedious 'paperchase'.

Concerns over the management of [Wider Key Skills] portfolios which is time-consuming and creates administrative problems with storage.

Allen Pritchard – Blaenau Gwent CBC (14–19)

8.8 The Review identified a need to overhaul the suite of Wider Key Skills, bringing in a broader set of skills, with new units added, affording more flexibility for different cohorts and contexts. They should be assessed in a more integrated way, with a greater proportion of externality and less repetition. The new qualifications should be trialled during 2014.

8.9 At 14 to 16, the new set of Wider Key Skills should be embedded throughout the curriculum and the Welsh Baccalaureate Core, and assessed through the Reflective Review. For learners post-16, the Welsh Government should give further consideration to the interface between Wider Key Skills and the Welsh Baccalaureate Core and other programmes of learning.

Recommendations

R26 The Welsh Government and WJEC should end the use of Essential Skills Wales qualifications at 14 to 16 within the Welsh Baccalaureate.

R27 The Welsh Government should work with awarding organisations and stakeholders to review the content and assessment of Essential Skills Wales qualifications in Communication and Application of Number and to develop a more robust, consistent and reliable assessment method, with a greater proportion of externality.

R28 The Welsh Government should work with awarding organisations and stakeholders to develop a new Essential Skills Wales qualification in digital literacy to replace the current Essential Skills Wales in ICT, with a revised assessment method.

R29 The Welsh Government should ensure that the shortcomings of awarding organisations highlighted in the recent *Essential Skills Wales Comparability Study on Communication Skills Levels 1–3 (Writing Component)* (Welsh Government, 2012) are addressed as soon as possible.

R30 The Welsh Government should work with awarding organisations and stakeholders to update Wider Key Skills qualifications by reviewing the content, structure and assessment method.

9. Vocational qualifications

9.1 Vocational education is vital to the Welsh economy. High-quality, relevant vocational qualifications meet the needs of many learners, and are often an essential prerequisite for achieving work-related ambitions. It is essential that clear progression pathways exist for learners wishing to follow a vocational route, and that the associated vocational qualifications have status and currency. The Welsh Baccalaureate framework provides general and vocational progression routes, and routes combining general and vocational qualifications. Learners receive the same Welsh Baccalaureate qualification at each level, whether they pursue a general or vocational pathway or a mixture of the two, as long as they meet the requirements. Proper recognition of the value of vocational qualifications will ensure that learners gain the skills needed by employers and the modern Welsh economy. The value of vocational education and qualifications is not universally appreciated, and the proposed communications strategy should address this by promoting a better understanding of the role and relevance of vocational qualifications. As well as their intrinsic value, vocational, and particularly hands-on qualifications, can motivate and engage some learners who might otherwise lose interest in education.

9.2 Vocational qualifications are, and will continue to be, offered primarily on a three-country basis. This is because they are based on National Occupational Standards, with little need for variation between countries within the UK. With some exceptions, Sector Skills Councils/Sector Skills Organisations (SSCs/SSOs) and employers welcome the continuation of this consistency.

9.3 Guidance from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training defines two categories of vocational qualifications:

- Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) is general or vocational education and training carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life. It does not lead to occupational competence
- Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) is education and training after initial education and training, or after entry into working life, for instance to improve or update their knowledge or skills or acquire new skills for a career move. It leads to occupational competence.

The Board is in favour of adopting these definitions in Wales in order to clarify the purpose of vocational qualifications and identify which ones are suitable for different age groups and settings.

9.4 Young people entering employment in the coming years are likely to change jobs, roles, settings and careers several times. They will need to be adaptable. Rather than training for a specific job at school or college they will be better served by gaining strong core and transferable skills, a broad knowledge and understanding and an ability to learn and develop. The qualifications system should therefore promote this broad approach.

9.5 The Review has concluded that for learners at 14 to 16, vocational qualifications should be aimed at providing a general introduction to an industry sector, rather than leading to occupational competence, and should form part of a broad and balanced general curriculum. The recommendations relating to performance measures at 14 to 16 and to the Welsh Baccalaureate model at 14 to 16 therefore limit the number of vocational qualifications that can be counted, and require these to be IVETs. This change should improve the coherence of progression pathways: several respondents noted that some young people who have achieved Level 2 vocational qualifications at 16 are not ready to progress to Level 3. However, they may well be ready to progress from Level 2 IVETs to Level 2 CVETs, which will make them more employable within the relevant sector. The clarity brought by the new definitions should help formalise this type of progression, reducing duplication of learning and the frustration sometimes felt by learners who remain at Level 2.

9.6 For many learners at 16 to 19, either IVETs or CVETs might be appropriate, and their learning programme might be predominantly vocational. The recommendations relating to post-16 performance measures and the National post-16 and Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate place equal value on vocational and general qualifications.

9.7 It is essential that vocational qualifications in Wales are high quality and robust, and that learners, employers and providers are clear about their relevance and value. The Review therefore makes recommendations about the assessment of vocational qualifications, ensuring that assessment is appropriate for the purpose and progression route and about the accreditation and approval process. The approval process should encourage excellence, for instance by ensuring that the right resources and expertise are in place for delivery – Section 10 (page 56) proposes new gatekeeping and quality assurance arrangements to achieve this.

9.8 In recommending appropriate externality in assessment, the Board is not necessarily advocating exams and external tests. Strong external quality assurance of internal marking and/or strict controls placed by awarding organisations on internal task-setting and task-taking conditions can also increase rigour.

It could be argued that fitness for purpose should be the main driver alongside the proper assessment of competence and skills. This can be done by external moderation and appropriate quality assurance systems, and be equally suitable as a means of assessing knowledge, understanding, analysis, evaluation and synthesis. It could also be achieved by externally set and marked tests.

Denbighshire County Council

Recommendations

R31 The Welsh Government should ensure that the qualifications system for Wales recognises appropriate vocational qualifications on a par with equivalent general qualifications. Under the proposed revised Welsh Baccalaureate model, vocational qualifications may constitute up to 40 per cent of the external qualifications at 14 to 16, up to 100 per cent of the external supporting qualifications for the National post-16 and up to 100 per cent of all external qualifications at Advanced level. Learners should receive the same Welsh Baccalaureate qualification at each level, whether they pursue a general or vocational pathway or a mixture of the two, as long as they meet the requirements.

R32 The Welsh Government should adopt the European convention of categorising vocational qualifications as either Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVETs), which are introductory and do not lead to occupational competence, or Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVETs), which lead to occupational competence. Of the two categories, only IVETs should be available to learners at 14 to 16, with either category available as appropriate post-16. Every vocational qualification approved for use in Wales should be clearly described as an IVET or CVET. Moving from IVETs to CVETs should be recognised as progression even where learning remains at Level 2.

R33 The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should ensure that the assessment of vocational qualifications is rigorous, valid and proportionate, with a level of externality that is appropriate for the subject and the activity being assessed. For vocational qualifications with a stated purpose of progression to higher education, written, externally marked assessment should form a significant part of the assessment method.

10. Relevance, value, quality and regulation

10.1 Although qualifications are traditionally classified as either 'general' or 'vocational' the Review has found that in reality there is a continuum from academic general qualifications through applied general qualifications to introductory vocational courses (IVETs) and finally fully vocational qualifications (CVETs) that attest to occupational competence in a specific area (see Figure 3). The Welsh Government, as the qualifications regulator in Wales, has a responsibility to ensure that qualifications across this continuum, for all age groups and all levels of ability, are relevant and valuable, and that their purpose is clear.

Figure 3: Qualifications Continuum 14 to 19

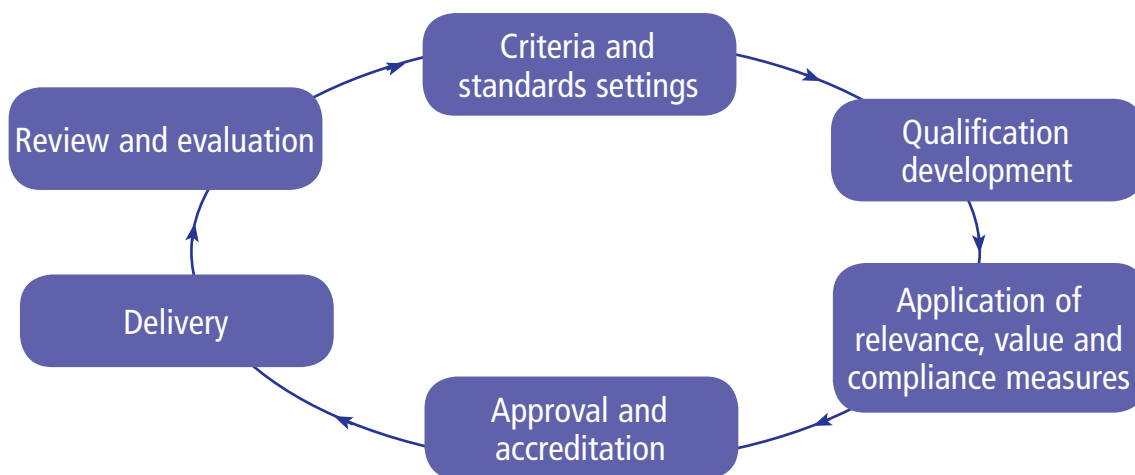
Academic GCSEs and A levels	Wales-specific academic qualifications	Applied GCSEs and A levels	Wales-specific applied general qualifications	Introductory accredited courses and units of credit that do not lead to occupational competence (using skills and/or knowledge elements of National Occupational Standards)	Licence to Practice courses	Apprenticeship frameworks	Continuing personal and professional development	Professional courses	Units of credit
Based on subject criteria				Based on National Occupational Standards					
Academic general qualifications 14+		Applied general qualifications 14+		IVET qualifications 14–16/16+ introductory courses		CVET qualifications 16+			
Welsh Baccalaureate									

10.2 The Review has concluded that the principles of relevance (seen in terms of progression to next-stage education or to employment) and value (seen in terms of broader educational benefit for the learner) should underpin the accreditation and approval process for all general and vocational qualifications for the 14 to 19 age group. The Review's recommendations relating to accreditation and approval of qualifications assume an evidence-based approach to establishing relevance and value, drawing on a number of sources including the stated purpose of the qualification, subject specifications and occupational standards.

10.3 The Review has found that there are too many qualifications at 14 to 19 in Wales. Work undertaken for the Review showed that many employers find the qualifications system complex and confusing, and most consultation respondents felt that the number of qualifications should be reduced. Qualifications approved for teaching in Wales and eligible for public funding are listed on the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales. In January 2012 there were 10,400 qualifications on the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales for the 14 to 19 age group, a number that increases year on year. As part of the Review, and in conjunction with awarding organisations, some qualifications were removed from the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales for the 14 to 16 and 16 to 19 age groups. A variety of methods was used, including removing qualifications that are not included in an apprenticeship framework and have not been offered in schools and FE colleges for 2012/13 or in the last two academic years (not including new qualifications). This work has resulted in the removal of 3,000 qualifications from the total for 14 to 19-year-olds. The Welsh Government is piloting further rationalisation with SSCs/SSOs.

10.4 For the future, a stronger gatekeeping process of accreditation and approval is needed. There is scope to reduce complexity and to introduce a more coherent and streamlined process, but it should be recognised that undertaking a much more proactive approach to approval will inevitably have resource implications for the Welsh Government. The Review has started outlining the process and criteria (see Figure 4, page 58) that might be used, but further development will be needed. The Review's recommendations include a role for SSCs/SSOs, to ensure representation of employers and industry experts, but where there are capacity issues in some sectors, other organisations might be used. It is envisaged that employers and industry experts will play an increasingly important role in the design, approval and delivery of vocational qualifications.

Figure 4: Outline of quality assurance cycle and draft criteria for approval



Draft criteria for approval of qualifications	
General Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Qualification type/purpose ✓ General qualification/IVET/CVET classification (if IVET/CVET is the qualification based on National Occupational Standards) ✓ Age appropriateness ✓ Whether awarding organisation has proposed for use and public funding in Wales ✓ Availability in Welsh ✓ Whether linked to the Unique Learner Number system ✓ Whether duplicate qualification(s) are available
Relevance	Size, level and content
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Appropriate size, level, content for cohort ✓ Context (Wales-specific policy, legislation, history, language, etc.) ✓ Appropriate assessment strategies
	Proven track record
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Data on progression to further education, higher education, employment, training and return on investment ✓ Rationale or evidence of need based on robust labour market information ✓ Evidence of take-up (low CVET numbers may indicate niche markets)
Value	Main purpose of qualification
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Essential or desirable for entry into the sector ✓ Whether used by sector as a licence to practice ✓ Whether used in apprenticeship framework/Pathways to Apprenticeship
Value	Content
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Promotes personal development ✓ Promotes employability ✓ Encourages participation in learning ✓ Develops generic transferable skills ✓ For Entry Level qualifications, promotes broad progression opportunities

10.5 The Review acknowledges the impact of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009. The recommendations of the Review will help to ensure that the courses being offered to learners as part of the Measure are those that help our learners to develop the skills and gain the qualifications required for progression.

10.6 Regulation of qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds also needs to be strengthened, with quality assurance activities supporting a process of continuous improvement by awarding organisations. The recommendations for improving regulation and quality assurance require awarding organisations to have appropriate arrangements to ensure that their qualifications are relevant and valuable, that the right resources and expertise are in place to deliver their qualifications in all settings and that information, guidance and marketing materials relating to regulated qualifications are appropriate and accurate.

10.7 The Review has concluded that all qualifications at 14 to 19 should be regulated qualifications accredited by the Welsh Government. At 16 to 19 there is some scope for the use of units of learning where these form a coherent part of wider Learning Area Programmes in the context of the Welsh Baccalaureate. In line with the efforts we are making to ensure the relevance and value of qualifications, these units should primarily consist of regulated provision.

10.8 In line with the recommendations of the separate Review of the Structure of the General Qualifications Market in Wales, the Welsh Government should continue to allow awarding organisations to deliver seminars in Wales, with the aim of sharing best practice and improving delivery of qualifications. Seminars should be subject to robust regulation, and should be made available to all, for instance online.

Recommendations

R34 The Welsh Government should ensure that the outcomes of the Review are reflected in the specification for the planned replacement to the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales. In respect of 14 to 19-year-olds, the new database should include all qualifications and units recognised for use in Wales.

R35 The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should develop a new and significantly stronger gatekeeping process for the accreditation and approval of all qualifications for use by 14 to 16-year-olds and 16 to 19-year-olds in Wales. It should:

- require awarding organisations to provide detailed evidence in relation to purpose, relevance, value, progression routes and involvement in the development process of employer or next-stage education providers
- establish appropriately representative sector qualification advisory panels to inform the accreditation and approval of vocational and relevant general qualifications for each age group, using agreed criteria relating to relevance for progression and broader educational value. The panels should also identify any gaps in relation to qualifications that assess the skills needed in their sector
- ensure that qualifications at all levels from Entry Level upwards are considered, with due weight given to criteria of engagement and motivation of all learners
- fund Sector Skills Councils/Sector Skills Organisations (SSCs/SSOs) or other appropriate employer/sector bodies to carry out a relevance rating of vocational qualifications to inform the work of the panels, and to identify gaps in provision
- ensure that all qualifications within programmes of learning at 14 to 19 are regulated qualifications accredited by the Welsh Government or Qualifications Wales.

Recommendations

R36 The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should strengthen and refocus the regulation and quality assurance of qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds, to ensure that awarding organisations give due consideration to:

- the relevance and value of qualifications, in particular progression and purpose
- the resources and expertise required in order to deliver and assess qualifications effectively in all settings
- the appropriateness and accuracy of information, guidance and marketing materials relating to qualifications.

R37 The Welsh Government should continue to allow awarding organisations to deliver seminars in Wales, with the aim of sharing best practice and improving delivery of qualifications. Seminars should be subject to robust regulation, and should be made available to all providers in Wales, for instance online.

11. Measurement of performance

11.1 Measurement of performance in this context is about reporting on the performance of providers rather than measuring an individual learner's achievement. Performance measures based on factors other than qualifications, for example attendance figures or free school meals, are outside of the remit of this Review.

11.2 The proposals presented in this report are designed to align with Welsh Government priorities regarding school improvement and performance monitoring, including the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 and secondary school banding.

11.3 Historically, Wales and England collected similar headline data, and it was possible to make generally reliable comparisons of performance between the countries. Changes announced in England mean that this will no longer be the case from 2014.

11.4 The means by which the Welsh Government measures performance influences the provision of qualifications in Wales. If our recommendations are adopted, it will be important to monitor their impact to ensure they act as positive drivers for the provision of qualifications in Wales. It is also important to continue to collect data for the current performance measures to provide continuity of data over time and maintain the ability to identify long-term trends.

11.5 As noted in paragraph 5.9 (page 36), the Board is recommending that measures of achievement of the National and Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate should become the primary means by which performance is measured and reported. At each level, the requirements of the Welsh Baccalaureate exceed the current thresholds by requiring completion of the Core. The proposed revised National Welsh Baccalaureate allows for achievement at National Foundation and National levels (see Figure 2, page 34). The National Foundation level exceeds the current Level 1 threshold. It also effectively exceeds a 'Level 1 inclusive' measure by requiring GCSEs in English Language/Welsh First Language and Numeracy. At National level, the Welsh Baccalaureate exceeds the Level 2 inclusive threshold and, by requiring specific English Language or Welsh First Language qualifications, avoids the current situation where success in certain literature qualifications is deemed to count towards the 'inclusive' measure.

11.6 Currently, some vocational qualifications taken at 14 to 16 are worth up to six GCSEs in performance terms. This creates incentives for schools to encourage take-up of vocational qualifications that attract heavy weighting in performance terms. This is not always in the best interests of learners. The Board has concluded that some current equivalences are not credible and, furthermore, they distort the choices offered and promoted. Misperceptions of the real worth of some qualifications can lead learners to make poor choices. The Review recommends changing the equivalences so that each vocational qualification attracts a value of not more than two GCSEs in performance terms. Additionally, to encourage the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum, vocational qualifications should contribute a maximum of 40 per cent of the current Levels 1 and 2 thresholds. More or larger vocational qualifications could still be taught, but would not count towards performance measures in the same way as they do now. This will reduce the risk of learners specialising too early. The proposed revised Welsh Baccalaureate model places a similar restriction on the proportion of external qualifications that can be vocational at 14 to 16.

11.7 Some recommendations address technical issues related to measurement of performance. Others introduce new measures to encourage different behaviours, such as requiring post-16 learners to continue to work towards Numeracy and English Language/Welsh First Language GCSEs if they have not already achieved an A*–C grade in these, and encouraging aspiration to the highest grades at A level by collecting data on achievement of these.

11.8 In the course of the Review it has become clear that it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons of performance between the post-16 sectors, because different data is collected for each. This needs to be addressed.

11.9 Published statistics on examination performance in schools use cohorts of learners who are aged 15 and 17 at the start of the academic year in question. Changing the approach to end of key stage rather than age at the start of an academic year would help support the principle of taking qualifications when ready rather than at a specific age.

Recommendations

R38 The Welsh Government should make attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate at the National Foundation, National and Advanced levels the headline performance measures at Levels 1, 2 and 3 respectively from 2017. At each of the levels, the Welsh Baccalaureate requirements exceed those of the current threshold measures. This change therefore represents a raising of the bar in terms of expectations about the qualifications learners should achieve.

R39 At 14 to 16, the Welsh Government should:

- continue to collect Level 2 (inclusive) threshold and capped points score data and use these as the headline measures in the medium term
- report separately on English Language/Welsh First Language and Mathematics (and, from 2017, Numeracy) to align with its priorities and the secondary school banding indicators
- introduce a limit of two GCSEs equivalence in performance terms per qualification, even where the stated size of a qualification is more than 240 Guided Learning Hours
- allocate appropriate qualifications a 0.5 GCSE equivalence where the stated size is between 60 and 120 Guided Learning Hours
- introduce a limit of 40 per cent on the contribution of non-GCSEs to the Level 1 and Level 2 thresholds (and to the external qualifications in the Welsh Baccalaureate at 14 to 16)
- amend the population used in reporting from 15-year-olds at the start of the academic year to the whole Year 11 cohort.

Recommendations

R40 At 16 to 19, the Welsh Government should:

- continue to collect Level 3 threshold and average wider points score data and use these as the headline measures in the medium term
- ensure that performance criteria support a unified national qualifications system for Wales, with data collected on a consistent basis across the school sixth form, further education (FE) and work-based learning sectors, on the basis of retention, completion, attainment and progression
- report on and encourage attainment of GCSE English Language/Welsh First Language and Numeracy at A*–C by 16 to 19-year-olds who have not achieved these by 16
- collect data on A*–B attainment at A level in the school and FE sectors and consider the scope for developing a 'Level 3 plus' threshold capable of measuring high attainment at Level 3 across sectors
- amend the population used in reporting from 17-year-olds at the start of the academic year to the whole Year 13 cohort.

R41 Once full and relevant completion and attainment data for 16 to 19-year-olds are available, Estyn should separately report on outcomes in sixth forms and tertiary provision in FE colleges, enabling comparisons to be made between the school and FE sectors.

12. Wider links and next steps

12.1 The scope of the Review was limited to qualifications at 14 to 19. Inevitably, there are close links with much wider issues of educational policy and practice, and implications for qualifications for adults. Apprenticeship frameworks were explicitly excluded from the scope of the Review. In implementing any recommendations that are accepted by the Welsh Government, it will be important to assess the impact on apprenticeships, other learner groups and wider policy.

12.2 The Review has benefitted from a high level of stakeholder involvement, from informal discussions, conferences and workshops, to focus groups, surveys and extensive formal consultation. It is one of the advantages of working in a relatively small country that policy-makers, practitioners and employers can work effectively together. In taking forward the recommendations and moving into the implementation phase, the Welsh Government should continue to involve stakeholders as appropriate. The Welsh Government should assess the impact on specific stakeholder groups of any recommendations it accepts.

12.3 The timing of implementation will be a matter for the Welsh Government. The Review Board sees the implementation of the full set of its recommendations as a five-year process, with transitional arrangements necessary during the change process. Some recommendations include indicative proposals for the timing of change. The suggested timeline for implementation at Figure 5 reflects these proposals.

Recommendation

R42 The Welsh Government should ensure alignment between the Review and its policies in other areas by:

- reflecting the Review's recommendations in its curriculum review and capturing the curriculum review outcomes in the revised Welsh BaccaLaureate model where appropriate
- continuing to work with partners in developing the Learning Area Programme approach to curriculum planning post-16 and ensuring that Learning Area Programmes are compatible with the National post-16 and Advanced Welsh BaccaLaureate framework
- using Welsh BaccaLaureate programmes as the basis of its emerging programme approach to planning and funding post-16 provision in sixth forms and colleges
- ensuring that funding and performance measurement arrangements act as drivers for change, supporting the recommendations of the Review
- ensuring that the careers service provides the advice and guidance that learners need when choosing between qualifications, including labour market information
- incorporating the training needs of teachers, lecturers and assessors in relation to the delivery and assessment of qualifications into initial training, continuing professional development and the new Masters degree in educational practice
- assessing the potential impact on provision for adult learners or apprenticeships of any recommendations made in this Review.

Figure 5: Suggested timeline for implementation of recommendations

